

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

# **Learning through Participation in a Playcentre Routine**

A thesis presented  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Master of Education (Early Years)  
at Massey University,  
Palmerston North, New Zealand

Paulene Heather Gibbons

2004

## Abstract

This study investigated the organisational culture of two New Zealand Playcentres in order to explore the way in which the culture influenced the learning experiences of the children. The study focussed on the morning tea routine.

A qualitative case study approach was employed, drawing on ethnographic methods. Qualitative observations at two playcentres during the morning tea routine, focussing on the actions of children, birth to five years, and adults, were used to explore the children's participation in the routine. Informal interviews and focus groups with adults, and field notes facilitated an exploration into the meanings the adults placed on the happenings during the routine of morning tea. The case studies were analysed using cultural models to consider the organisational culture of the centres. A further analysis of children's learning employed Rogoff's three-plane model of analysis.

The study of the routine of morning tea in these centres indicated that the physical environment and historical influences impacted on the practices in the centres, and the social, philosophical and pedagogical beliefs of the participants were evident in the interaction patterns between adults and children, and children and children. Both centres showed characteristics of being communities of learners with parental involvement as educators, and yet favoured an individualistic orientation. These characteristics influenced the way the centres operated, and thus the learning opportunities for children and their parents. Children were learning, in differing ways, what it meant to be a member of their playcentre during this routine.

It is argued that the organisational culture of the centre influences the participants' views of learning, the social patterns in evidence in the centre, the structuring of the programme, and therefore the opportunities for children's learning.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to acknowledge the following people who made this thesis possible:

### **The participants**

Many thanks to the families in each of the two playcentres who gave their time to talk with me, to explain their ways and the thinking behind their ways. I am grateful for those children and adults present on the sessions, who allowed me to 'look over their shoulders' and be a part of their centre.

### **Massey University College of Education**

Thank you to my supervisors, Joy Cullen and Cushla Scrivens, whose knowledge of the areas into which I was researching was invaluable. Their support, thorough proofreading and critique were appreciated. The Distance Library Service provided timely responses to all requests, which greatly eased my way as a distance student. The Graduate Research Fund grant, which covered direct costs of much of the research and the Massey University Human Ethics Committee that reviewed and approved the research, PN Protocol 02/06, were also necessary parts of this research.

### **Family and friends**

Appreciation is also extended to friends and colleagues whose inquiries and interest gently buoyed me along. My family, Phil, Catherine and Suzanne never doubted that I would finish and gave the support and time needed for this. Yvonne Guy, my current employer, saw the research as important to me, and allowed generous use of the photocopier, and flexible working days and hours. Ella Kahu, whose academic interest was encouraging, proofread the final draft.

# Table of Contents

Title page	i
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Contents	iv
<b>Chapter One: Introduction</b>	
<b>1.1 Introduction</b>	1
<b>1.2 Focus of the study</b>	1
<b>1.3 Routines in early childhood</b>	2
<b>1.4 Communities in educational practice</b>	3
<b>1.5 Playcentre in New Zealand</b>	3
<b>1.6 Methodology</b>	5
<b>1.7 Reasons for the study</b>	5
<b>1.8 Aims and organisation of the thesis</b>	6
<b>Chapter Two: Literature Review</b>	7
<b>2.1 Introduction</b>	7
<b>2.2 Organisational culture</b>	7
2.2.1 The concept debated	7
2.2.2 Educational research in organisational culture	10
2.2.3 Cultures of collaboration	13
2.2.4 Organisational culture and children's learning	14
2.2.5 Playcentre and organisational culture	16
2.2.6 Models for examining organisational culture	18
2.2.7 Summary	19
<b>2.3 Routines as a visible part of a centre's culture</b>	20
2.3.1 Reasons for routines	21
2.3.2 Change in routines	22
2.3.3 The place of routines in early childhood	23
<b>2.4 Socio-cultural perspective of learning</b>	25
2.4.1 Development as transformation of participation	26

2.4.2 Research analysed through Rogoff's lenses	27
<b>2.5 Learning through community</b>	29
2.5.1 Communities of learners	29
2.5.2 Educators in ongoing learning	31
2.5.3 Active learners	32
<b>2.6 Summary and rationale</b>	33
<b>Chapter Three: Methodology</b>	35
<b>3.1 Introduction</b>	35
<b>3.2 Methodological approach</b>	36
3.2.1 Multiple case studies	36
3.2.2 Ethnographic perspective	36
<b>3.3 Participants and setting</b>	38
<b>3.4 Data collection methods</b>	39
3.4.1 Observation	40
3.4.2 Interviewing	40
3.4.3 Focus group	42
3.4.4 Collections	43
<b>3.5 Fieldwork</b>	43
<b>3.6 Rigour</b>	44
3.6.1 Dependability	45
3.6.2 Critical subjectivity	46
3.6.3 Quality of description and interpretation	47
3.6.4 Inclusion of ethics as rigour	47
<b>3.7 Ethical considerations</b>	47
3.7.1 Research with children	49
3.7.2 Research bias	50
<b>3.8 Analysis</b>	51
3.8.1 Frameworks for analysis	52
3.8.2 Organisational culture	53
3.8.3 Children's learning	55
<b>3.9 Strengths and limitations</b>	55
<b>3.10 Summary</b>	57

<b>Chapter Four: Results: Organisational Culture</b>	58
<b>4.1 Introduction</b>	58
<b>4.2 The Centres</b>	59
4.2.1 Rimu Playcentre	59
4.2.2 Kauri Playcentre	60
<b>4.3 Views through the key-hole (the stories of morning tea)</b>	60
4.3.1 Morning tea at Rimu Playcentre	60
4.3.2 Morning tea at Kauri Playcentre	61
<b>4.4 The five colour filters</b>	62
4.4.1 Environmental	63
4.4.2 Social	67
4.4.3 Philosophical	74
4.4.4 Structural	78
4.4.5 Pedagogical	82
<b>4.5 Summary</b>	88
<b>Chapter Five: Results: Learning Experiences</b>	90
<b>5.1 Introduction</b>	90
<b>5.2 Community plane</b>	91
5.2.1 Taking an individual part	91
5.2.2 Knowledge of adult and child roles	93
5.2.3 Toddlers have a unique status	94
<b>5.3 Interpersonal plane</b>	96
5.3.1 Learning rules	96
5.3.2 Learning through concerned care for siblings	97
5.3.3 Morning tea as a time regulator	98
5.3.4 Learning by intent participation	99
5.3.5 Learning through direct adult attention	100
<b>5.4 Personal plane</b>	102
5.4.1 Understanding others' needs	103
5.4.2 Learning competence in self-care skills	104
5.4.3 Sharing knowledge	105
<b>5.5 Summary</b>	107

<b>Chapter Six: Discussion and Conclusion</b>	109
<b>6.1 Introduction</b>	109
<b>6.2 Morning tea as a setting for learning</b>	110
<b>6.3 The influence of tacit assumptions on children's learning experiences</b>	111
<b>6.4 Learning as a socio-cultural happening</b>	117
<b>6.5 Community of learners</b>	119
6.5.1 Place of parents	122
6.5.2 Becoming a member	123
6.5.3 Individualism	124
<b>6.6 Challenges of the research</b>	125
<b>6.7 Contributions of the research</b>	128
<b>6.8 Implications of the research</b>	129
6.8.1 Implications for practitioners	129
6.8.2 Implications for policy and theorists	130
<b>6.9 Further research</b>	131
<b>6.10 Conclusion</b>	132
<b>Reference List</b>	135
<b>List of Appendices</b>	
<b>Appendix 1 Descriptions of centres:</b>	151
Rimu Playcentre	151
Kauri Playcentre	154
<b>Appendix 2 Transcript of coded field notes</b>	156
<b>Appendix 3 Focus group consent forms</b>	161
<b>Appendix 4 Focus group questions</b>	162
<b>Appendix 5 Initial permission granted from Playcentre Association</b>	164
<b>Appendix 6 Initial letter to centres</b>	165
<b>Appendix 7 Information sheets</b>	166
<b>Appendix 8 Consent forms</b>	168



## List of Figures and Tables

<b>Figure 3.1 Five colour filters</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Table 4.1 Summary of environmental view</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>Table 4.2 Summary of social view</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>Table 4.3 Summary of philosophical view</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>Table 4.4 Summary of structural view</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>Table 4.5 Summary of pedagogical view</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>Table 5.1 Community Plane – Apprenticeship examples</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>Table 5.2 Interpersonal Plane – Guided participation examples</b>	<b>102</b>
<b>Table 5.3 Personal Plane – Participatory appropriation examples</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>Table 6.1 Tacit assumptions and children’s learning experiences</b>	<b>112</b>